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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by the International Federation of University Women, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[14 February 2014]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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International Federation of University Woman (IFUW) calls for Human Rights Education to Prevent Human Trafficking and Forced Marriages

Human rights, more specifically girls' and women's rights, are violated daily. Human trafficking or trafficking in persons is the trade of human beings for the purpose of exploitation, such as forced labour, sexual exploitation or slavery. It occurs world-wide. Inequality, poverty, and discrimination create environments in which vulnerable groups are at increased risk of trafficking. Poor girls and young women are at particular risk of falling victim to traffickers.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, states that a person is a child until 18 years of age. Child marriage is the marriage of a person under the age of 18. A forced marriage occurs when one or both people do not freely consent to the marriage and pressure or abuse is used. When young people are not in a position of power it is difficult for them to refuse to marry an individual of their parents' choice and who is not the partner of their choice. This serious human rights violation particularly affects girls and their ability to live free from all forms of violence. According to figures recently released by United Nations Family Planning Association (UNFPA), 142 million girls will become child brides between 2011 and 2020.

A young woman with the immature body of a child should not be forced to undergo sexual relations without her consent, to become pregnant and to bear children. Child marriage is a risky undertaking for a girl and families may be unaware of the full extent of damage that child marriage causes to girls' health, mental wellbeing and future prospects. It adversely affects a girl's human right to education and to the highest attainable standard of health, including sexual and reproductive health.

Human trafficking or "modern-day slavery" occurs when individuals, most often women and girls, are coerced or tricked into sexual slavery, prostitution, commercial sexual exploitation such as pornography or exploitative jobs for low or no pay. They may be detained, isolated and threatened. Impoverished parents may sell children to traffickers in order to pay off debts or gain income, or because they think that they are selling their children into a better life with prospects of training and income. Globalisation and the rise of internet technology have facilitated sex trafficking. Traffickers use explicit sites including social networking and underground sites to market, recruit, sell, and exploit women and girls. Social norms marginalise the value and status of women and girls in society, making it easier for them to become victims of trafficking. The persistence of the global recession has led to increased numbers of people being duped into sex and labour trafficking.

Torture by private individuals, families, groups, or like - minded others (non-state actors) is an emerging gender-based human rights violation. Non–state actors is the official terminology used by the United Nations to refer to private individuals, in this case exploiters, paedophilic rings, groups, gangs, or like-minded intergenerational family systems, guardians, or spouses who do not represent the State when they inflict their acts of torture. Globally, women and girls are the predominant victims of gender-based discrimination and violence in the 'so-called' private or domestic sphere, including forms of torture inflicted by non-state or private actors. To prevent and protect the human right of women and girls not to be subjected to acts that constitute torture perpetrated by private non-state actors, such a crime needs to be explicitly criminalised.

What is at Stake?

One in every three women globally has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime.

"Education is the foundation and catalyst for changing the state of human rights in the world," said International Federation of University Women[1] (IFUW) President Catherine Bell. "Access to human rights education and access to education are indivisible and should be promoted throughout society."

Trafficking of women and girls and child early and forced marriage are impediments to the achievement of advances in economic, legal, health and social status of women and girls and to the sustainable development of the community as a whole.

They indicate deep rooted discrimination against women and girls, violate their rights and prevent the girl child's full enjoyment of her rights. Traditional and cultural practices that place women in subordinate roles to men must be addressed.

It is time for Governments and society as a whole to invest in measures that provide full access to education, health care and empowerment for women and girls through their meaningful participation in decisions that affect them if we are to break the cycle of gender inequality, discrimination, violence and poverty and work towards sustainable development and economic growth.

Poverty, child marriage and human trafficking are closely connected. While marriage for a girl is seen as a way to ensure a daughter's future, it often compromises her health, closes her mind and keeps her ignorant, isolated, impoverished and dependent.

IFUW's Position

The organisation calls for Governments to end human trafficking and child marriage through meeting their UN Commitments and Agreements and through the implementation of existing national and international laws related to these.[2]

The organisation promotes education, including education for human rights, to ensure that conflicts and instability no longer halt or reverse progress wherever they occur. Child marriage, torture by non-state actors and organised crime, including trafficking in people and drugs, all violate human rights and undermine development.

Through education, families and communities learn about the benefits of educating their girls. Secondary, tertiary and continuing education are a girl's greatest protection from early marriage and trafficking and the poverty, dependence, violence and abuse that they induce.

Recommendations

The International Federation of University Women calls upon the 25th Session of the Human Rights Council (HRC) to:

- Embed Women's Rights, Empowerment, Equality in the Post-2015 Development Agenda;
- Promote equal education opportunities for girls including disaggregated data on access to education for girls;

[1] The International Federation of University Women (IFUW) is based in Geneva, Switzerland, and has an international membership. Founded in 1919, IFUW is the leading girls' and women's global organization run by and for women, advocating for women's rights, equality and empowerment through access to quality education and training up to the highest levels. IFUW has special consultative status with ECOSOC.

[2] "Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses" (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948)

"The betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect" (CEDAW Article 16.2)

- Ensure that all girls, including the indigenous, disabled, displaced, those living in conflict areas and the poor, receive the maximum amount of quality schooling possible, ideally completing secondary, tertiary and continuing education;

- Encourage citizens to hold their governments to the enforcement of treaties they signed such as The Convention of the Rights of the Child, The Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination against Women;
- Urge governments to introduce legislation that specifically aims at criminalising human trafficking and to develop systems of world-wide co-operation between law enforcement agencies and non-government organisations (NGOs);
- Urge governments to work to eradicate poverty, which is an indispensable requirement for sustainable development, and which will help protect women and girls from child marriage and sexual exploitation;
- Ensure that comprehensive and cultural contextual awareness raising is conducted involving all sectors of society including the media, parents, caregivers, religious leaders and community elders and those with specific responsibilities towards children on the harmful aspects of child and forced marriage and trafficking;
- Enact and strictly enforce laws to ensure that marriage is entered into only with the free and full consent of the spouses and to raise the minimum legal age of consent and raise the minimum age for marriage where necessary.

IFUW urges every state to:

- Institute and enforce a minimum marriage age of 18 years for girls and boys
- Enforce existing international and national laws on child and forced marriage and promote measures to protect women harmed by polygamy and dowry-related violence
- Ensure that registration of application for marriages is strictly enforced so that authorities can intervene to prevent the child bride practice
- Provide support and assistance for victims of child and forced marriages and exploitation to obtain medical, psychological, and other assistance
- Collect sex-disaggregated data on marital status and age
- Introduce legal measures to prohibit underage and forced marriages
- Create financial incentives for families to keep their daughters in school
- Create and enforce laws on the right of inheritance for girls
- Include sexual, maternal and reproductive health in its national school curriculum
- Ensure that every child is registered at birth
- Develop a national plan of action to educate its population about the evils of child marriage and sexual exploitation together with other national organisations, including the use of all media